




## CREATIVITY PHENOMENON IN THE CONTEXT OF MEDIEVAL CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY

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*Abstract:* Based on the analysis of fundamental worldview principles of the leading medieval philosophers – Aurelius Augustinus and Thomas Aquinas – the conceptual principles of the phenomenon of creativity in Medieval literature are established. It is concluded that human creativity in the medieval Christian paradigm is associated with the divine, manifesting as salvation through union with God. In medieval Christian philosophy, creativity is not just a person's action but also the appearance of a chance for a particular person to accept the new ontological status due to gravitating towards God and the Absolute.

*Keywords:* Christianity, Aurelius Augustinus, Thomas Aquinas, spirituality, language, ontological status, act of will, time.

### Introduction

Among the fundamental anthropological problems that are covered in various spheres of spiritual culture (for example, Zhanabayev, Kolganatova, Suleimenova, & Garifolla, 2020; Rakimzhanova & Rakymzhanov, 2019), an important place was held by the problem of creativity. From the ancient Greek philosophers (Yakovlev, 2003) to the present time (Kiseleva, 2014), representatives of various cultural traditions (Nemchinova, 2016) tried to find out the secret of creativity and come closer to understanding this phenomenon.

Creativity was the subject of analysis in both art and religion, psychology and natural science. However, the problem of creativity is clearly an

immanently philosophical one. Only philosophy is characterized by an extremely wide level of generalization in the process of researching the problems of creativity, to the extent of bringing the problems to the level of existence and non-existence, which makes it possible to identify and expound the universal laws of the creative process (Batezhenko, 2011).

At the same time, philosophical studies that would be entirely devoted to the problem of creativity in the Middle Ages are not sufficient (Batishchev, 1997) since researchers focus on the achievements of thinkers in the development of this problem, starting from the Renaissance.

The purpose of the article is to analyze the theoretical, ideological reflection of the phenomenon of creativity by medieval Christian think-

ers, who had a dramatic impact on the constitutive foundations of the concept of creativity in the European philosophical tradition.

### Analysing the Phenomenon of Creativity in the Medieval Christian Tradition

The medieval Christian tradition considers a person created in God's image and likeness and "with the interpretation of the human mind as a small copy of the Divine Mind, which can comprehend the plan of the Divine creation" (Stepin & Kuznetsova, 1994, p. 8).

Man is the crown of God's creation in God's image and likeness – this personal godlikeness predetermines the highest value of the man who becomes the owner of everything that was created for him. God gave man the world and gave him the right to govern the world since man is a child of God, and man's fate is the lot of the whole world.

Thus, in medieval Western European philosophical and cultural thought, Christian theocentrism came to the foreground: man, according to P. Gurevich (1999), "correlated with the idea of an absolute personal God who reveals his knowledge in Revelation. In the Middle Ages, the world was created for man, and man was God's highest creation on earth, was considered exclusively in relation to God because salvation could not be achieved on one's own" (p. 166).

The whole world, in all its diversity and versatility, with all the problems and contradictions, unfolds between the two poles of Christian philosophy, God and man. The incarnation of the Son of God and the beginning of his mission had great ontological significance. The Divine and the human, spirit, and matter, the ideal and the real, formed a new connection, as a result of which new prospects for the cultural and social development of mankind have appeared (Bychkov, 1995).

The goal of man is understood as salvation, an ascent to God, a dialogue with God, and the achievement of the Kingdom of Heaven. Man's goal is to become like God. For the human race as a whole, the possibility of changing its ontological status first appeared. Man gets a chance to go beyond the existing order of things and bring a fundamental change to the world. Christ the Logos gave a new meaning, which consisted

in finding oneself, in the opportunity to ascend to God, and heralded that there was a chance to change the order of things in the world.

Therefore, the variability of the world arose, and variability in its absolute sense is nothing more than creative potential. God, who is the fullness of being, a creative act, detached the world from himself, and the bearer of the meaning of the world is the man. The principle of variability arose as a principle of creativity. A person can change the world, unfold the historical process in time, and become the creator of history. Everything that arises and disappears in space has true meaning only to the extent that it is significant in relation to man and God (Stokes, 2008).

In the Christian consciousness, creativity does not yet manifest itself as the creation of the objective world but shows itself to be an internal state (existential rather than psychological) and reveals the direction of implementation, which is a movement towards merging with God. Creativity is shown as an orientation and a person's striving for God, which is an ideological intention to divine fullness. This state of devotion to God is an act of will, which is a component of what does not exist but can arise through it (Gaut, 2010).

From the period of early New Testament Christianity (Aurelius Augustinus, Martianus Capella, Isidore of Seville) to the completion of the formation of scholasticism (Bonaventure, Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas), medieval philosophers regarded creativity as an act of mystical invocation, as a way of union with the divine (Copleston, 1997). Having appeared as a chance to overcome the ontological status, creativity was an activity not alienated from the fullness of man's Being who, through creative activity, became a person. However, man always remembers that the source of creativity is transcendence beyond the other side of everything, worldly and material. In this respect, creativity is inherently mystic. However, creativity would not be counted among the "eternal" problems if creativity by nature were not a junction of two worlds if, in the principles of creation as such, it did not matter that creativity was an act that a person performed as a living instrument of the Existence.

In German mysticism of the late 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries (Meister Eckhart, Henry Suso, Johannes

Tauler), the essence of the phenomenon of creativity is concentrated and expressed, which was discovered by the advanced Middle Ages, namely, the balance of individuality and inalienability from the fullness of being which is concentrated in God (Copleston, 1997). However, the analysis of the phenomenon of creativity in medieval philosophy in the study will be focused on the works of earlier medieval thinkers – Aurelius Augustinus and Thomas Aquinas.

### The Creativity Phenomenon in the Views of Aurelius Augustinus

In the works by Aurelius Augustinus, one finds the complete presentation of the philosophical teachings of the era of early New Testament Christianity. It is significant that Saint Augustine directly addresses God in work “Confessions” (Blazhennyi Avgustin, 2020), and this conversion is not an abstraction but a living act of faith.

In interpreting the nature of creativity, Saint Augustine considers creativity in the context of the Christian concept of creationism. God creates the world “out of nothing” (*ex nihilo*) and creates outside of time since He also creates time. God is eternal and unchanging. Before the creation of the world by God, there was nothing but God Himself. Through the act of creation, “almost nothing” has arisen “out of nothing”, hence the imperfection of things. God granted being to all entities. However, the highest manifestation of being is inherent only in Him, but individual entities also have various manifestations. Therefore, none of the entities is alien to God as their creator (Blazhennyi Avgustin, 1998, p. 569). The world bears the imprint of “nothing”, which is manifested in the lack of good, that is, the absolute “essence” – God (Blazhennyi Avgustin, 1998, p. 468). Striving for Divine fullness is the inner basis for the realization of the possibility of change, which was revealed as creativity. Through timeless creation, God sets the principle of creativity as such, and the principle is realized through man.

The value of the world created by God lies in its uniqueness. Being timeless, God creates the world that exists in time, and time is understood not as a cyclical return of the same process but as an irreversible course of history, a movement from the past through the present into the future.

Each event in time is unique, like the entire world created by God.

According to Saint Augustine, God creates out of His highest wisdom and according to His own free will. Creating the world, God already knows in advance the fate of everything that God contemplates in the ideas of his mind. Saint Augustine calls God an Artist who has in his mind an unlimited number of creative ideas, which He implements in specific creations.

In Saint Augustine’s texts (Blazhennyi Avgustin, 1998, 2000), there is a conviction that only God is the creator of everything, and if God could not create, then there would be nothing. Since man is the image and likeness of God, man’s creation of artefacts is a projection of divine creativity. Man acts in the likeness of divine archetypes. However, what a person implements does not belong to them, since a person realizes artistic intentions through talent and receives for himself a certain fruit, a product, but these intentions belong to God, for the man himself is the embodiment of a divine plan.

Based on aesthetic prerequisites, artistic creativity is seen in the spirit of Platonism as an imitation of divine ideas. According to Saint Augustine, the mind of God the Creator, His “wisdom”, contain the ideas of all possible specific creative forms. Naturally, it is God who guides and inspires human creativity. At the same time, in fact, an element of mysticism is seen in all types of creative activity. In search of inspiration, the artist turns directly to God and often receives inspiration in certain revelations. As J. Le Goff (1992) writes:

to go and recover the hidden truth on the other side of deceitful earthly reality was the major preoccupation of the men of the Middle Ages. Medieval art and literature were full of integumenta or veils... Everyone was in search of visions and apparitions, and they were often favoured with them (p. 319).

Considering that everything true and perfect in human creativity is due to God, and everything imperfect and false is contributed by man, Saint Augustine notes that the same idea can be embodied in different forms. The choice depends on the will of the man-creator (Blazhennyi Avgustin, 2000). The introduction of the artist’s will (*voluntas artifices*) into the creative process is an important achievement of Saint Augustine’s

concept of creativity. In the philosopher's opinion, the will contributes to the embodiment of creative potential, coordinating the movement of the artist's idea and the parts of his body that implement these ideas in matter. The Creator's will determines the specific form of implementation of a particular idea.

The process of the creation of the world is seen by Saint Augustine as consisting of three aspects: the Divine idea, the intention of creation, the implementation of this idea in the sphere of higher spiritual entities and the emergence of the work itself. These three aspects are implemented seemingly simultaneously since there was no time before the creation of the world. In fact, Saint Augustine sees this as a significant difference between divine and human creativity (Blazhennyi Avgustin, 2000, p. 113).

The second difference between human and divine creativity, according to Saint Augustine, is the fact that God the Creator created everything with His Word. This Word is the eternal mind, "in which nothing begins and ceases to be" (Blazhennyi Avgustin, 2020, p. 218). The Divine Word created the whole world at the moment of creation and, at the same time, continues to create the world constantly (Blazhennyi Avgustin, 2020, p. 218). This Word granted man creative abilities, the ability to create in the soul an idea of what must be created, as well as sensitivity, with the help of which the soul can assess whether the creation is well fulfilled (Blazhennyi Avgustin, 2020, p. 216).

Thus, Saint Augustine describes the stages of the creative process clearly: the emergence of an idea (the idea of the work), its concrete implementation in the material, and evaluation of the creation. Divine creativity is fully consistent with the plan, and for the man-creator, according to Saint Augustine, the work which is in the plan is real and true since such work is eternal.

Having called a certain creation into existence, God must manage and take care of the creation, while the creations of people can exist without their creators. God, having created the world in the days of creation, sowed the seeds of all creations and continues to create constantly, developing the potencies inherent in the seeds.

The perfect Creator has in his mind a large number of creative ideas or designs, which are implemented in specific works. The Creator creates with his Word (*logos*) through a volitional

impulse; that is, by an effort of will, the Creator materializes this or that idea in a concrete form. The aim of creativity is beauty and goodness. The creative process of the real Creator is determined by three conditions: nature, art, and benefit. Nature is understood by Saint Augustine as a natural gift, a talent; art is knowledge and possession of skills and techniques of a particular type of creativity, and the benefit determines the fruit of creative activity. Noting that benefit and fruit lead to different kinds of actions – to use and enjoy – Saint Augustine points to the dual purpose of creativity – utilitarian and aesthetic.

However, one cannot ignore another aspect of Saint Augustine's interpretation of the phenomenon of creativity. With the emergence of Christianity, man gets the opportunity to change his ontological status. Such a change, which manifests itself as the first definition of creativity, is recognized as the possibility of salvation and manifests itself in the will of man. Creativity is an act of will, but this act is not the voluntarism of an autonomous individual whose free will is directed towards anything. The idea is that creativity always contains direction – an act of will that is both the will of God and man. The use of free will is only justified when it strives to merge with divine fullness. The will of God and the will of man coincide, and this coincidence gives man the opportunity to excel himself, that is, to create. This excellence, in turn, is the transition to a divine being. The personality is revealed in its fullness and authenticity in such activities directed toward God (Neretina, 1995).

Therefore, creativity is an act of life in striving for God, and it is what is called improvement. Creativity, introduced into the world by Christianity and conceptualized by Saint Augustine, is not so much associated with the design of the aesthetics of human creativity but manifests itself, first of all, as human salvation, as a change through union with God, as a product of the possibility of creating a new status in the being of a particular person.

"For if the soul, once delivered, as it never was before, is never to return to misery, then there happens in its experience something which never happened before; and this, indeed, something of the greatest consequence, to wit, the secure entrance into eternal felicity" (Blazhennyi Avgustin, 1998, p. 600).

## The Creativity Phenomenon in the Work by Thomas Aquinas

In the period of the advanced Middle Ages, existential and worldview homilies changed to a degree. The main trend is the search for opportunities to comprehend the divine through the development of humans. A fundamentally new problem of this period in connection with the main task – cognizing God through the human – is the question of possible ways of knowledge of God. Medieval thinkers became convinced that God can be cognized and comprehended not only through faith but also directly by the human mind (Copleston, 1997). The teaching of Thomas Aquinas develops in this direction. The philosopher discovered the mind as an instance of the Divine in man and considered the mind to be the fundamental basis of man in general and human cognition in particular. Man is the only being endowed with the mind, and this makes man godlike. The mind is a God-given wealth that binds a person to Him with an inextricable bond. Aquinas finds an instance of salvation, and this instance is in the person themselves; it is inherent in them, which means that the person's strength and will are a tool for implementing the direction of ontological change that was discovered in the early Christian period (Spiering, 2015).

Thomas Aquinas sees the world as divine fullness. Therefore every step of thought must be both an action of the mind and an act of love for God. Thus, Thomas Aquinas is convinced that the inner basis of human existence is faith. Only by listening to what faith “whispers” can the mind become inventive. A Believing Soul can hear the Divine Word.

Proceeding from the rationality of man, God can be cognized by operating with the mind, and at the same time, the method of cognition will be conclusions by analogy, that is, cognition of God proceeding from His highest creation – man, since everything inherent in the created one belongs to the Creator, albeit to a different degree.

Thomas Aquinas is convinced that only God is the creator, and everything that exists is created by God. For Thomas Aquinas, writes É. Gilson (2004), “creativity as a product of all being lies in the act due to which the Being, that is, the pure act of being, appears as the cause of the final acts of being” (p. 127).

Since God is the highest being, and if any be-

ing becomes the cause of the emergence of another being, then this is because God gives them the ability to create. God, creating man in His likeness, endows man with an active, creative ability, the instrument of which is the mind. Possessing such a divine way of being, man, creating at his own level, becomes God's helper, which gives man special greatness. However, this greatness, according to Thomas Aquinas, should not be associated with modern egocentrism but with unlimited obedience. This greatness is based on a deep and active realization that the foundation of man is laid precisely in God. The fullness of the likeness of God is manifested in the personality, the centre of which is an action that constantly alters a person, taking as a basis the Absolute being – God. Man is revealed as an ontologically significant entity that brings divine completeness to the world due to the presence of a common instance with God – the mind. The mind matters exclusively as the moment of merging with the Divine, as the likeness of God (Hofmann & Michon, 2017). However, the mind as an active, creative force makes sense only in correlation with faith while maintaining the tension of all internal forces in the experience and awareness of God's presence. Creativity is an act of deep self-revelation in the mind, which turns out to be a mediator between the divine and the human, and for the first time, is filled with genuine existential meaning. Realizing the limitless perfection of God, Thomas Aquinas emphasizes the equal nature of man and God, and in fact, from this, new dimensions follow in the understanding of creativity. Energetic activity and creativity become human, that is, inherent in the essence of man.

The fundamental discovery here is that the autonomy of man as an active ability is not sinfulness but mature independence concentrated in mind (Bradley, 2008). Thomas Aquinas sees man as an active part of the universe. In the essence of man, the philosopher discovers an ambivalent force belonging to two worlds – the mind of man. On the one hand, the human mind has a single nature with the divine mind, and on the other hand, through divine nature, the human mind is independent. It is this independent movement of the mind which is a movement towards God, this belief in oneself, which makes it possible to achieve felicity in God, and determines the essence of the creative. Creativity is

expounded as an activity of the individual, and this is the path to salvation and felicity. Creativity is viewed as inherent in being, and being endowed with creative potential, thanks to it, turns out to be ontological.

To conclude the comparison of the philosophy of Saint Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, we consider it necessary to highlight the main criteria and show the difference in views (Table 1).

Table 1.

Comparative Analysis of the Creativity Phenomenon in the Teachings of Saint Augustine and Thomas Aquinas

Criterion	Saint Augustine	Thomas Aquinas
God the Creator	God is the creator of everything that exists; without God, there would be nothing	Only God is the true creator, and everything that exists is created by God
Source of man's creative abilities	The Word of God endowed man with creativity	God endowed man with the mind as an instrument of creativity
Human creativity	A projection of divine creativity	The act of self-revelation in mind, the mediator between the divine and the human
Mechanism of human creativity	The ability to create an idea of creation in the soul and sensitivity, with the help of which the soul evaluates the creation	The mind creates in conjunction with faith
Result of the creative act	Human salvation, change through union with God, the possibility of creating a new ontological status	Path to salvation and felicity

## Conclusion

The analysis allowed us to identify the main approaches to the concept of creativity within the framework of medieval Christian thought. According to it, creativity was considered an act of mystical conversion, a way of unity with the divine, a balance of individuality and non-alienation from the fullness of being concentrated in God.

Analyzing the phenomenon of creativity in medieval philosophy in the works of Aurelius Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, we can distinguish the following fundamental differences in their interpretation of the concept of creativity, firstly, in understanding the origins of human creative abilities, which for Aurelius is the Word of God and for Thomas – God-given reason, as a tool for creativity and, secondly, in understanding the essence of human creativity, which for Aurelius is a projection of divine creativity while for Thomas, it is an act of self-disclosure in mind, a mediator between the divine and the human.

At the same time, the common understanding of the concept of creativity by these medieval thinkers is the fundamental source of human cre-

ativity – God the Creator – who is the true creator of everything that exists, as well as the result of a creative act that marks human salvation, change through unity with God, and the path to salvation and bliss.

The study limitations are associated with the analysis of the ideological positions of only representatives of Latin patristics (Aurelius Augustine) and scholasticism (Thomas Aquinas). Therefore, the analysis of the phenomenon of creativity in the works of representatives of the Byzantine (Orthodox) philosophical school may become a prospect for further research.

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